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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000922

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TAGS: [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: DRC BRIGADIR GENERAL ADDRESSES CORRUPTION AND  
PERSONNEL ISSUES IN FARDC

REF: A. KINSHASA 850  
[1](#)B. KINSHASA 858

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Samuel V. Brock for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: In a September 15 meeting with the Ambassador and Transparency International Co-founder Michael Hershman, DRC Brigadier General Celestin Mbala Musense discussed issues concerning corruption, salary payment, and personnel management in the FARDC. Reftels are reports on Hershman's other meetings while in the DRC. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On September 15, Brigadier General (BG) Celestin Mbala Musense, who simultaneously serves as the senior military advisor to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and is the Director of Personnel for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), met with the Ambassador and co-founder of Transparency International Michael Hershman to discuss security sector reform (SSR) and ways to combat corruption in the FARDC. Also present were BG Mbala's military assistant, Major (FNU) Kabamba and a translator from the U.S. Embassy. BG Mbala opened the meeting by stating that GDRC President Joseph Kabila was aware of the meeting and its relationship to the recent visit of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

[1](#)3. (C) Responding to a question about how the FARDC was addressing the issue of paying its soldiers in the context of anti-corruption efforts, BG Mbala began by thanking the U.S. Government (USG) for its interest in the fight against corruption and noting that he was not aware that this was the focus of the USG delegation's visit. He then noted that President Kabila was acutely aware of the problem of corruption and had a special counsellor devoted to the issue of fighting it. BG Mbala then stated that, fortunately, he was able to comment on this topic in the context of the FARDC because he simultaneously served as the President's military advisor and FARDC chief of personnel, responsible for administration, pay, and military justice. In this vein, he asserted, it was his intention to ensure that every member of the FARDC received his or her salary.

[1](#)4. (C) When asked about the biometric census recently conducted with the assistance of the European Union Security Mission in the Congo (EUSEC), BG Mbala noted this effort represented the first major step towards creating an accurate payroll for the FARDC, and that though expensive, in the long run the effort would pay for itself and result in having more pay available for the FARDC. BG Mbala explained that the biometric portion of the census was achieved via two fingerprints, and that 25,000 identification (ID) cards had been issued in Kinshasa alone at present. He noted that the ID card process itself had enabled the FARDC to retire many unfit or overage personnel, but that it was now on hold due

to lack of funding and the rapid integration of armed groups into the FARDC. To get the ID card issuance back on track, BG Mbala stated that the FARDC would first have to conduct a census of the newly integrated personnel. FARDC strength after the census was 126,000, but had grown considerably due to the recent integration process.

15. (C) Turning to FARDC pay, BG Mbala noted that the biometric census had not prevented embezzlement of the payroll and stated that the next step was to work with banks to establish accounts for each member of the FARDC so that Qto establish accounts for each member of the FARDC so that their salaries could be directly deposited to them. In the meantime, he stated that the FARDC was going to implement an information technology based control system to combat embezzlement. He stated that the GDRC needed to find a way to encourage FARDC personnel to save money as well, to include many of its senior leadership. He then indicated that corruption was not the only reason the payroll lost funds, observing that some of the payroll was actually used to pay transportation costs for delivery of the cash to the FARDC in remote areas. Another mitigating factor that BG Mbala brought up was the difficulty associated with keeping the FARDC census accurate as soldiers moved between military regions.

16. (C) BG Mbala stated that the FARDC's military medical system could not cope with the demands placed on it and suggested that a form of health insurance might be a useful way to address this issue. He stated that it would require debiting money from soldiers but argued that there was no other way to provide routine medical care to FARDC personnel.

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17. (C) Turning to the subject of corruption in the FARDC itself, BG Mbala stated that officials guilty of it had been punished in accordance with the military justice system to set a tone of zero tolerance. Replying to a question about sentences for embezzlement, he noted that it depended on the gravity of the situation but was usually between three and fifteen years. He mentioned one vignette in which a FARDC officer was sentenced to twelve years for collecting the payroll from the bank after it was wired there then keeping rather than distributing it. Further, he stated that the FARDC was holding a two-week seminar starting on 21 SEP 09 to sensitize FARDC officials to the problem. The need for seminars of this type became evident during visits to units in the field, which revealed glaring weaknesses in this area, particularly amongst former rebels who integrated into the FARDC in senior leadership positions for political reasons. BG Mbala noted that the GDRC needed to replace them with professional officers and make assignments based on merit in spite of the political difficulties associated with this course of action.

18. (C) Responding to a question about financial disclosure statements, BG Mbala stated that they were required for civilian officials in the GDRC but not FARDC leaders. He agreed that it might be a good idea to implement them, but also cautioned that change would be slow.

19. (C) Addressing the subject of rations for FARDC personnel and their families, BG Mbala noted that costs varied widely depending on family size and location. Kinshasa and Lubumbashi were much more expensive in every category (food, health care, etc) than more remote areas, yet FARDC members did not receive a cost of living allowance. He stated that the lack of garrisons or barracks exacerbated the problem, forcing soldiers to live on the economy.

110. (C) Responding to the suggestion that the FARDC pay its personnel with a mixture of cash and commodities such as food or ration cards for the same, BG Mbala indicated that a system similar to this already existed but had been interrupted by the fighting. This system consisted of farms worked by conscripts, whose crops were sent to government-run

ration stores on military bases. Any excess not needed on base was distributed to the populace as a civic action program. BG Mbala stated that the FARDC intended to re-start this process in camps supported by the United Nations Development Program. Ultimately, he asserted, the best way to care for FARDC personnel was to use their ID cards as a form of debit card to pay for food, health care, school fees, etc, minimizing the need for cash and thereby freeing the soldier from mundane worries.

¶11. (C) In answer to a question about the FARDC procurement system, BG Mbala responded that the FARDC's central logistic base in Kinshasa maintained all classes of supply. It's logistics officer was responsible for sending requests for logistics support to the FARDC's Chief of Staff for endorsement, who then forwarded them to the Minister of Defense (MoD) for approval. Once approved, the request went to the MoD's procurement office for action.

¶12. (C) In closing BG Mbala opined that the FARDC had been severely destabilized by the political decision to integrate so many untrained, undisciplined rebels into its ranks since 1998. He welcomed efforts by partners such as the USG, Belgium, South Africa, Angola, and France to help transform this rabble into the core of a professional army with a new mentality. He noted that some of the students in the USG-sponsored training at the Groupement des Ecoles Militaires Superieures for officers and noncommissioned officers were not up to the standard he had hoped, and stated that he would use the census as a means to screen unqualified personnel out. Ultimately, he hoped to put in place a system with an electronic personnel file for each member of the FARDC, but this would have to wait until the census was complete.

¶13. (C) As the meeting wrapped up, BG Mbala noted that he had joined the army thirty-four years ago, had been the President's senior military advisor for five years, and the FARDC chief of personnel for two. He stated that he was eligible for retirement in one year based on time in service, but that he needed to wait until he was sixty years old to qualify based on age.

¶14. (C) Comment: BG Mbala was polished in his delivery and

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had obviously done his homework prior to the meeting. He hit all of the topics one would expect to elicit sympathy for the FARDC's predicament, such as lack of funds, the destabilizing influence of integrating rebels, and ongoing combat operations. He also addressed those topics which would elicit empathy with proposed solutions, such as direct deposit pay, health insurance for FARDC personnel, and punishment for corruption. Having served as military advisor to President Kabila, one should not be surprised by his effective delivery. One interesting note was his statement that the integration process, an inherently political move, was the reason behind the FARDC's current level of anarchy. The poor performance of the former Armed Forces of Zaire (ex-FAZ) in 1998 and previously belie this thesis and may point to a more fundamental weakness in the military culture of the various Congolese armed forces.

¶15. (C) Comment Continued: BG Mbala occupies a unique position close to President Kabila but reportedly not in his inner circle. His role appears to be that of a capable and loyal technocrat who gets things done for President Kabila and his inner circle. His description of the "formal" procurement system for the FARDC was all the more ironic, therefore, since it is probable that he is involved at a technical level in importation of weapons and munitions using the parallel system run by the presidency. End Comment.

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